



Article

The Authentication of the Past: Narrative Representations of History in the Gospel of John

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Abstract

Narrative historiography in John's gospel operates with a number of literary strategies, such as historical referentiality and eyewitness testimony, which serve to authenticate the narrative and to inscribe the (hi)story of Jesus into ancient history. At the same time, these authentication strategies are counteracted or 'ruptured' (for example, by strategies of fictional literature), which situate John's narrative of this-worldly history within a symbolic, metahistorical framework; yet these strategies are not to be perceived as detrimental to the reception of the text as a factual text. This article discusses two narrative strategies through which referentiality and authenticity are created as well as counteracted in the Johannine text; it also describes the forms and functions of these literary strategies that support the christological conception of history in John's gospel.

Keywords

Gospel of John, Christology, historiography, fictional narrative, factual narrative, fictivity, authenticity, authentication strategies

1. The Historiographical Claim of the Johannine Narrative

The Gospel of John narrates the Jesus story and then ends with the statement: Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μαθητὴς ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ τούτων καὶ ὁ γράψας ταῦτα, καὶ οἶδμεν ὅτι ἀληθὴς αὐτοῦ ἡ μαρτυρία ἐστίν. Ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἃ ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἅτινα ἐὰν γράφηται καθ' ἓν, οὐδ' αὐτὸν οἶμαι τὸν κόσμον χωρῆσαι τὰ γραφόμενα βιβλία (Jn 21.24-25). These verses imply that John narrates selected events from

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the life and works of a historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. What is reported is called ‘true’ and is authenticated by eyewitness testimony, but it is also intended to lead readers to believe ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ and to convince them of the salvific relevance of this faith (Jn 20.30-31). In the last verses of ch. 21, John claims to narrate events of the past with historical referentiality, i.e. to convey history in narrative form. Because of this distinctive claim to historical referentiality, the Gospel of John can be defined as a ‘narrative of reality’ (‘Wirklichkeitserzählung’),¹ presented in a factual mode of speech which expresses a historiographical concern. This is the starting-point of my analysis.² However, given that extra-textual referentiality in ancient texts is often not historically verifiable,³ my focus is not on the question of what can be established as fact or fiction in the sense of a correspondence theory of truth, but rather on the question of what the text *represents* or *constructs* as fact or as fiction, and by which literary strategies this is achieved.

In what follows I will, first of all, briefly examine the perception of fact and fiction in ancient literature and also the discussion about the genre of the Gospel of John (Section 2). Then I will focus on the question of ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’ in the literary depiction of the past (Section 3). Two of John’s literary strategies of authentication, historical referentiality and eyewitness testimony, are then investigated. (Section 4). It will be shown that authentication strategies are, on the one hand, masterfully applied in the Gospel of John, but, on the other hand, they are counteracted or ‘ruptured’, such as when a strategy cannot be traced through the entire text or when opposing strategies are concurrently used. However, the use of authentication strategies and their continual rupture can be interpreted as an overarching literary strategy in itself. Authentication and the breaking of the authenticity construction are closely interwoven in the Gospel of John, but without them being detrimental to the text’s general claim of presenting the past. This distinctive way of depicting historical reality is – as will be shown – inspired by Johannine Christology, and it characterizes the Johannine representation of history (Section 5).

2. Fact versus Fiction in Antiquity and the Question of the Genre of John’s Gospel

In his *Historia ecclesiastica*, Eusebius refers to Clement of Alexandria concerning the order in which the gospels were written. Clement testifies that ‘last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had [already] been made plain in the

1. Cf. Klein and Martínez 2009.

2. For a detailed analysis of the authentication strategies in the Gospel of John, see Luther 2021.

3. And yet: ‘selbst wo methodisch eine historische Referenz nicht mehr bestimmbar ist, kann man nicht unmittelbar folgern, daß das Erzählte eine bloße theologische Fiktion wäre’ (Frey 2009: 501).

Gospels, being urged by his students, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel' (πνευματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.7). Ever since, the Fourth Gospel – the theological gospel – has tended to be neglected as a source in historical Jesus research. The theological scope of the Gospel of John has – in the eyes of many interpreters – pointed to a symbolic interpretation of many historical details, and this has led to the assumption that the material in the text is both ahistorical and inaccurate. This notion dominated research until at least the nineteenth century. But there have always been voices stressing the historical dimension of John's gospel: The works of exegetes like E.R. Goodenough, C.H. Dodd, R. Bultmann and F. Mussner constitute major milestones in the perception of the historical value and claim of John's gospel (cf. Anderson 2006: 594-95). More recently R. Bauckham (2007: 94), P. Anderson (2006),⁴ U. von Wahlde (2006: 523-86),⁵ A. Köstenberger (2013: 435-62) and J. Zumstein (2004: 62-77)⁶ have focused on the literary form of John and have emphasized close parallels to ancient forms of historiography while also giving attention to its symbolic and theological aspects (cf. also Becker 2015: 269-81). An important observation in this respect is what H.W. Attridge has termed 'genre bending'. Attridge argues that the Gospel of John – as was the customary practice in ancient literature – intentionally bends the conventions of ancient historiography and biography in order to convey the deeper truth of the gospel story (2015: 27-46). This suggests that the most promising way to analyze how John writes his Jesus story is not by defining analogies between the Gospel text and ancient literary conventions, but rather by describing the literary strategies through which the Gospel of John generates and establishes its claim to narrate a meaningful Jesus (hi)story.

The perception of John's Gospel as a narrative which claims to represent past events, that is, as a narrative with a historiographical claim, is fundamental for acquiring a proper understanding of the text. The Gospel of John conforms to the conventions of ancient historiographical works in linking factual contents, fictionalizing narrative strategies and fictitious elements in order to convey the truth of the depicted past;⁷ it can thus be subsumed under the broad category of

4. See also the publications of the John, Jesus, and History-Project: Anderson, Just and Thatcher 2007, 2009, 2016; Anderson 2009; cf. also Thompson 2007: 103-107.

5. Cf. also in this respect Blomberg 2001: 56-57; Bennema 2014: 4-25.

6. Cf. also Zumstein 2016: 37: 'Unter Fiktion ist ... die Art und Weise zu verstehen, in der der Erzähler sein Material auswählt und es in Erzählform bringt, indem er es an einen bestimmten Platz in der erzählten Geschichte stellt, indem er es hervorhebt, entfaltet, umformuliert oder interpretiert. Eine historische Darstellung, die immer ein Konstrukt ist, kommt nicht umhin, Geschichte und Fiktion miteinander zu verflechten. Im Gebiet der Geschichtsschreibung entstammt die Fiktion also nicht primär der Phantasie, sondern gehört in den Bereich der Interpretation.'

7. For ancient historiography in relation to the gospels, see Backhaus and Häfner 2007; cf. also Becker 2010: 1787-817; Becker 2017.

ancient historiographical literature.⁸ As more recent discussion in the field of ancient history has stressed, historiographical narrative – especially in antiquity – must not be equated with the reporting of facts.⁹ Rather, the constructivist and narrative character of any representation of history must be taken into account, which implies that the incorporation of fictive elements and fictionalizing narrative strategies does not negate the historiographical claim that is made by an ancient text.¹⁰

The Johannine narrative of the past presents itself as a text in a *factual mode of speech*¹¹ making a claim to historical referentiality.¹² Since, however, this kind of referentiality is often not historically verifiable in ancient texts, it proves difficult to determine the factuality or fictitiousness of the narrated past and thus the value of the source for gaining historical knowledge. Rather, the focus should be on the literary devices through which the historiographical claim of the text manifests itself, that is, on the literary techniques and strategies used to present the text as a representation of historical reality, to authenticate the individual elements within the framework of the overall narrative, and thus – in the case of the Gospel of John – to (re)construct the story of Jesus. Therefore, the focus of my

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8. Zumstein 2016: 156: 'Offenkundig war es nicht Joh' Intention, ein Werk der Geschichtswissenschaft zu schreiben ... Es war für ihn von höchster Bedeutung, daß es einen Jesus von Nazareth gab, der in Palästina lebte und starb, auch wenn es nicht zu seinen Absichten gehörte, einen genauen Abriß der herausragenden Ereignisse im Lebenswerk dieser Person zu geben. Er versuchte den wahren Sinn des Lebens und Todes von jemandem darzustellen, von dem er glaubte, es sei der Sohn Gottes, ein Wesen aus einer Sphäre jenseits der Geschichte.'
 9. For the genre of historiographical narrative, see Munslow 2000: 169-70; cf. Munslow 2007; also, Jaeger 2002a: 237.
 10. Cf. Luther 2015: 184-92; see also Munslow 2007: 84, who states that fact material 'has no utility until it is encoded and given meaning (a signification) in an explanatory narrative. This confronts us with the fact that "the past" does not exist except in the form of "the-past-as-history": this is why there are, in other words, only histories.'
 11. Schaeffer 2014: 98: '(a) semantic definition: factual narrative *is* referential whereas fictional narrative has no reference (at least not in "our" world); (b) syntactic definition: factual narrative and fictional narrative can be distinguished by their logico-linguistic syntax; (c) pragmatic definition: factual narrative advances *claims* of referential truthfulness whereas fictional narrative advances no such claims'. Cf. also Irsigler 2015: 24: '[f]aktuales Erzählen ist lebenswirkliches Erzählen oder Erzählen mit dem Geltungsanspruch der Referenz der erzählten Personen, Handlungen und Ereignisse auf außersprachliche Wirklichkeit, d.h. mit dem *Geltungsanspruch der zumindest prinzipiellen Referenzialisierbarkeit* des Erzählten. Anders gesagt, der Autor bzw. der Erzähler tritt mit dem *Anspruch* auf, *authentisch, d.h. glaubwürdig* zu erzählen, reale Sachverhalte darzustellen (auch wenn er lügen sollte!). Er will seine Adressaten/Rezipienten von der Wahrheit des Dargestellten überzeugen.'
 12. See Jaeger 2009: 110: 'Historiographisches Erzählen ist am pragmatischen Anspruch erkennbar, auf eine außertextuelle vergangene Welt zu referieren und nicht eine eigenständige fiktionale Welt zu erschaffen'; cf. also Jaeger 2017: 162-80.

analysis is on those particular literary strategies, but also on the theological statement(s) and the historical consciousness (“Geschichtsbewusstsein”)¹³ conveyed through this particular form of representing past events in the Gospel of John.

3. The Question of Truth and Authenticity

The Gospel of John states repeatedly that the narrated events are ‘true’ or ‘the truth’ (cf., e.g., Jn 19.35; 21.24). However, the referentiality claimed in the gospel text is not to be equated with factual truth, for ‘[t]o assume that Johannine truth claims refer to historicity in terms of detailed historical accuracy is simply to make a category mistake’ (Lincoln 2007: 179). ‘Truth’ (ἀλήθεια) in John is not to be sought within the narrow constraints of a historicist understanding of the factual representation of the past.¹⁴ The gospel narrates past events *as* real events using a factual narrative mode. But the distinction suggested in literary studies, for example by Martínez and Klein,¹⁵ between ‘factual’ vs. ‘fictional’ (regarding the mode of speech) on the one hand and between ‘real’ vs. ‘fictive’ or ‘fictitious’ (regarding the ontological status of the depicted element) on the other hand, cannot easily be implemented in the case of ancient texts. While the *claim* to historical referentiality and the ways in which it manifests itself in ancient texts (the mode of speech) can be analyzed, the distinction between ‘real’ and ‘fictitious’ (the question of the truth ‘behind’ the text) often cannot be answered. Therefore, with regard to the analysis of ancient narrative texts, it is helpful to replace the terms ‘real’ or ‘true’ with the concept of (a literary constructed) ‘authenticity’,¹⁶ for ‘authenticity, understood as an essence beyond representation, replaces the concept of truth and thus constitutes an attempt to creatively dissolve the opposition between reality and fiction’.¹⁷ Consequently, an analysis of a factual text has to focus on the literary techniques and narrative strategies by which authenticity, including fictitious authenticity, is constructed.¹⁸

13. Cf. Landmesser 2017: especially 74; Becker 2014: 277.

14. On the concept of truth in the Gospel of John, see van der Watt 2009: 317-33; Kirchschläger 2009: 213-34.

15. See Martínez and Scheffel 2012: 15-16; this differentiation is based on the distinction between fictional and factual speech, whereby factual speech is equated with authentic in which factual = authentic and fictional = inauthentic (2012: 17), and authenticity is equated with (historical) referentiality; cf. Weixler 2012: 19; further Zipfel 2001.

16. For the terminology and definition of authenticity, see Knaller and Müller 2006; Kalisch 2000: 31-44; with a view to biblical studies, see Theißen 2016: 181-200; Niemand 2016: 201-27.

17. Funk and Krämer 2011: 12-13 (my translation); cf. also Reicher 2007.

18. See Kreuzer 2011: 179-204; cf. Ilgner 2012: 198-201; also, Fischer-Lichte and Pflug 2007; Pirker et al. 2010.

The focus of the analysis, then, is not the truth or the reality *behind* the text, but the truth *within* the text as substantiated by ‘authentication strategies’ that generate or simulate the authenticity of the representation, and thus establish the reliability of what is portrayed and also support the truth claim of the Gospel of John (cf. Ankersmit 2002). To sum up, the quest for the ‘historical reality’ of what is portrayed in ancient texts can be transformed into the quest for the ‘authenticity’ of the portrayal; thus, ultimately a *referential* concept of authenticity is replaced by a *relational* one.¹⁹ This means that in literary texts it is not the question of extratextual referentiality that guarantees authenticity, but rather the literary procedures that trigger an ‘effect’ of authenticity upon the reader.²⁰

In the Fourth Gospel the Johannine understanding of ‘truth’ seems very closely linked with history: As the revelation of the Logos has taken place in history, the story of this Logos has to be conveyed in the form of a historiographical presentation. History thus becomes the medium to convey truth, so that, concretely, the gospel narration becomes the medium to convey the history of Jesus and thus the medium to convey the truth which leads to faith (Jn 20.30-31; 21.24-25). As a result, the focus of my analysis of the Johannine text is not ‘factual truth’ or ‘the reality’ behind the text, but the text itself and the specific narrative techniques and literary strategies that create or even construct the authenticity of the narrative presentation, thus establishing the credibility of what is depicted and supporting the Johannine truth claim.

4. Strategies of Authentication in the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John uses a broad variety of literary strategies to authenticate its narration. In another study, I have analyzed a number of such strategies (see Luther 2021): historical referentiality, the concept of eyewitness testimony, the reliability of the narrator, the integration of elements of fantasy and fictional microgenres into the overall narrative as well as intertextuality and the use of sources in John. The use of these narrative strategies is widely documented in ancient literature, but their application and interplay within the Johannine text create a web of authentication and, moreover, provide insights into the overall understanding of history in the Gospel of John. In what follows I will briefly elaborate on the strategies of historical referentiality and eyewitness testimony.

19. Weixler 2012: 2; cf. also Martinez and Scheffel 2012: 132-44; for a discussion of the notion of ‘reality’, see Durst 2008: 34-36.

20. For references to the discussion about authenticity in antiquity, see Weixler 2012: 4-9; Knaller and Müller 2000: 40-65; Knaller 2006: 17-35; Röttgers and Fabian 1971: 691-92; Krückeberg 1971: 692-93.

4.1 Historical Referentiality

Historical referentiality plays an important role in the construction of an authentic representation of the past. The historical reference, which is achieved through narrative elements, can be called 'narrative reference'.²¹ The Gospel of John makes use of narrative referentiality through references to historical places, times, persons and situations as well as through short passages of ekphrastic representation.²² These references to extratextual reality serve to connect the narrated world to extratextual reality and thereby lend it authenticity.²³ With regard to John's gospel, the different dimensions of referentiality perform concrete functions: through text-internal referentiality (through the repeated reference to an event such as the wedding at Cana, narrated in Jn 2.1-11 and mentioned again in Jn 4.46), the text becomes a coherent unit which appears to the reader as an authentic representation of historical reality. Through text-external referentiality, by reference to historical places, situations and persons, the Jesus (hi)story is integrated into contemporary history and historical context (cf. Bauckham 2007: 95-103).

However, the claim to historical referentiality in John does not indicate whether it is a matter of historical-factual or fictitious referentiality (with, for example, a symbolic or theological meaning), or whether the two aspects of meaning play into one another. It is not possible to claim the historical-referential function of the narrative over and against its theological or symbolic meaning, for both aspects are often attributed to one and the same reference.²⁴ Hence, while the Johannine narrative presents its reported contents with a claim to historical referentiality, it does refer to non-identifiable places (e.g., the house of the Father in Jn 14.2), fictive narrative characters (e.g., angels in Jn 20.12) and times outside earthly time (e.g., pre-existence in Jn 1.1-2). These references point to an elementary 'rupture' in the authentication strategy, since they challenge the perception of these places, characters and time as historical-factual references, and could be interpreted as a construct implying a fictional mode of speech. But the reference to theoretically historical information in the Johannine narrative, such as detailed descriptions of situations and events (e.g., of the soldiers at the arrest in Jn 18.3), can of course also be a fictitious construction. Even if constructed, these details serve to create a 'reality effect' (Roland Barthes) within the text.²⁵

21. For terminology and definition, see Grethlein 2010: 21-39.

22. Vater 2005; cf. De Jong and Nünlist 2007; for the role of ekphrasis, see Whitaker 2015; Neumann 2015.

23. Cf. Grethlein 2013; in combination with eyewitness testimony, see Wang 2017: 52-119, 200-22.

24. Cf. Neyrey 2009; Koester 2003: 309-11. The same applies to narrated time; see Frey 1998; also, Estes 2008; Harweg 2008.

25. Cf. Barthes 1966: 1-27; 1967: 65-75; 1968: 84-89; for the application to biblical exegesis, see Finnern 2010: 197-98; cf. also Dennerlein 2009; and, with a view to ancient texts, de Jong 2012.

Thus the representation of historical events is authenticated by literary strategies and, at the same time, this ‘authenticity’ is repeatedly ruptured. Nevertheless, the overarching effect of the narrative upon the reader is to perceive the gospel as reporting authentic historical events in a factual mode of speech.²⁶

In the larger narrative context it can be seen that, through Jesus, a historical person who is anchored in a particular historical setting, both narrative strands are rooted in the historical context of the first century CE: that of the Jesus story, which narrates the life and works of the earthly Jesus, and that of the ‘extra-historical’ story of God with the world, which is expressed through pre-existence, incarnation and return to the Father. Through their intertwining with contemporary history, both narrative strands – the narrated Jesus-story as well as the extra-historical story – are attributed authenticity.²⁷

4.2 Eyewitness Testimony

Yet another authentication strategy is the introduction of eyewitness testimony.²⁸ In ancient historiography, eyewitness statements were a repeatedly used *topos* designed to support the credibility of the report (Byrskog 2000: 48-65). Authors referred to their own involvement or at least their own observation of the events reported or the historical sites of the events in question (direct eyewitness testimony); or their statements were based on the reports of eyewitnesses other than themselves (indirect eyewitness testimony).²⁹ Reporting past events was not understood in a historicist sense as an objective presentation of historical factual truth, but as a presentation of events that was subject to interpretation and prepared in a meaningful way for the audience.³⁰ The use of the concept of

26. Cf. Jaeger 2002b; Nünning 1999.

27. In this context, see Bauckham 2007: 102: ‘John incorporates history into metahistory. These mere two-and-half years of this-worldly history are framed by reference to the beginning of time at the outset of the Prologue, and to the end of time, in Jesus’ last words in the Epilogue (21.23)’; and Bauckham 2007: 103: ‘Ordinary history is transcended in metahistory, but this can happen only through Jesus’ real presence in ordinary history. Thus the story bears emphatically the marks of historiography at the same time as it bursts the boundaries of space and time.’ Cf. also Kunath 2016.

28. See Byrskog 2000; Riesner 2007: 337-52; cf. also Bauckham 2003: 28-60; 2006, and the controversial discussion in *JSHS* 6 (2008) and *JSNT* 31.2 (2008); cf. also Schröter 2008: 219-33.

29. Cf. Byrskog 2000: 64; Rothschild 2004: 215-16.

30. Byrskog 2000: 145-59; Zimmermann 2015: 233-34, who argues: ‘Wer im Augenzeugen gerade den Garanten für die Faktizität der Geschichte erkennen möchte, der muss sich der narrativen Konstruktivität der Wahrnehmung des Augenzeugen im Vollzug der Ereignisse bewusst [sein]’, for ‘Augenzeugen können keine Fakten wiedergeben, weil diese nicht existieren. Wenn aber die Verlässlichkeit der Augenzeugen auf der Ebene der Korrespondenz von Geschichtswahrheit und Augenzeugenbericht ins Wanken gerät, dann kommt gleichsam auch die durch Augenzeugen erhoffte Geschichtshermeneutik zum Einstürzen. Wenn es keine

eyewitness testimony serves to authenticate the information given within the text, but it cannot verify what is narrated in a historically objective sense. The *topos* of eyewitness testimony was used in antiquity as a literary strategy for authentication, but it could also be constructed in a way suggesting the reliability of the representation of the events in question.³¹

In the Gospel of John, the naming of witnesses in the prologue and epilogue already points to their central role in accentuating the credibility of the events depicted in the narrative. Prominent witnesses to the truth are, among others, the beloved disciple and (possibly fictitious) author of the gospel, John (the Baptist), Jesus, the Father, the scriptures and the paraclete.³² Hence the concept of (eye-)witness testimony in John can be compared with historiographical conventions used as a literary strategy for authenticating the narrative. At the same time, reading through the gospel text, it becomes apparent that this strategy is not being consistently pursued or even that it is ruptured. For instance, eyewitnesses are named anonymously (e.g., the Beloved Disciple), eyewitnesses mentioned in the text are not explicitly used to testify to the events (e.g., the women under the cross in Jn 19.25), credible eyewitnesses are not generally preferred over and against anonymous or implausible eyewitnesses (e.g., πολλοὶ ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων instead of Mary and Martha in Jn 11.45), while some passages are issued as fictitious eyewitness reports (e.g., the scenes inside the praetorium in the context of the trial before Pilate in Jn 18.28–40).³³ The text uses this powerful literary strategy inconsistently and does not use it to the extent of full authentication. Given that the gospel was composed by a very creative and highly capable author, it seems apt to assume that the way he used this strategy betrays intent and thus provides insight into his distinctive way of presenting the past.

Moreover, it has to be observed that, despite this rupturing of literary strategies, the perception of the text as an authentic representation is intensified. When, for example, the author draws on anonymous characters as witnesses or on characters classified as untrustworthy, the reader may conclude that it is precisely in these places that the ‘truth’ is being reported, for apparently the specified (unsuitable) witnesses were the real (eye)witnesses (and there were no better ones). The perception of construction and fictitiousness would rather be evoked if only credible witnesses were referred to throughout the narrative. Of course, this may

Fakten im positivistischen Sinn gibt, dann können auch Augenzeugen dieselben nicht verbürgen. Anders gesagt: Was Augenzeugen zu berichten haben, ist nicht verlässlicher als jede andere Form der Vergangenheitsreferenz. Es sind jeweils Erzählungen über Ereignisse, die demselben hermeneutischen Zirkel unterliegen, wie literarische Zeugnisse’; cf. also Ricœur 2008: 11.

31. See Rothschild 2004: 211–90, especially 211–18; Byrskog 2000: 214–23.

32. Cf. Jn 5.31–40; 8.13–18; cf. Zimmermann 2015; further Rösinger and Signori 2013.

33. Cf. Zumstein 2016: 687–88; for attempted explanations of this tradition as historical, see Carson 1991: 587; Blomberg 2001: 241.

also be read as a literary strategy of intentional – possibly constructed – authentication.

5. The Christological Purpose of John's Authenticating Strategies

As indicated above, the Gospel of John employs a variety of authentication strategies that are also attested in ancient literature and support the perception of the text as an authentic representation of the past. At the same time, these artistically and effectively applied methods are not followed through, either, for example, because John uses other literary devices that actively counteract the strategies of authentication or because the latter are revealed to be constructed strategies. This 'rupturing' of strategies is not due to the author's shortcomings; it rather challenges the form and function of the text, as well as the possibility and necessity of authenticating that which is depicted within the text. The author plays with various literary strategies in a confident manner: constructing and 'rupturing' authenticity are closely interwoven without them being detrimental to the text's claim to historical referentiality and perceived authenticity. Rather, authentication and its rupturing reveal an overarching textual strategy that conveys a specific message about the Johannine presentation of history.

Through this distinctively Johannine way of constructing an authentically narrated past, the reader is, on the one hand, led to understand the Jesus story as a representation of historical events, and is also encouraged, on the other hand, to recognize the Christ, the incarnate Son of God, in Jesus of Nazareth and thereby to find faith and life (Jn 20.31). The factual and at the same time counterfactual presentation of the Johannine Jesus story, which certainly goes beyond conventional narrative methods of ancient historiographical-biographical literature, encourages the reader to learn to bring together the divine and the human side of Jesus through the form of the narrative.

And herein lies the central christological concern of Johannine historiography: the text offers more than a mere historiographical representation of past events. It offers the story of the incarnate Son of God in the story of the earthly Jesus. How is this central christological concern conveyed in the Johannine form of historiography? The Fourth Gospel, on the one hand, tells the story of Jesus, depicting past events about the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth in narrative form. It reminds, testifies, interprets and records them in the written form of the gospel. John therefore conveys to the reader the claim that the text is to be perceived as a historiographical work representing historical events about the earthly Jesus. The story of the earthly Jesus, on the other hand, is not simply a biographical account about a historical person. It is the story of the Son of God who came

into the world.³⁴ Although this story is closely interwoven with earthly history, it cannot be equated with a biography and must therefore, on the literary level, be presented in a distinctive way. The interplay of authentication and authentication-rupturing strategies makes it clear to the reader that John's gospel is a presentation of history that goes beyond ancient historiography.

John is not merely concerned with writing an account of past events that is to be presented and interpreted in a meaningful way for the present. Its distinctive way of writing history is designed to convey to the reader the truth about God's revelation in Jesus.³⁵ The fundamental claim of Johannine narrative historiography, reflected in its characteristic literary form and christological focus, indicates that this account of the past goes beyond conventional historiography, in order that 'you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ; Jn 20.31).

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34. 'Die Alternative "historischer Jesus"/"Christus des Glaubens" verbietet sich daher schon erzähltheoretisch, denn einen Zugang zu Jesus von Nazareth kann es nicht jenseits seiner Bedeutung für die Gegenwart geben. Ebenso wenig ist es aus erzähltheoretischer Sicht möglich, Jesus von Nazareth auf das "Daß" seines Gekommenseins zu reduzieren, denn eine solche Minimierung auf einen völlig abstrakten Kern macht eine Rezeption unmöglich! Das bloße "Daß" eines Gekommenseins ist weder vermittel- noch rezipierbar! Erst die Erzählung eröffnet Räume für Rezeption und Interpretation, ermöglicht Transformationsleistungen, wie sie in den Evangelien vorliegen' (Schnelle 2004: 59-60).

35. Cf. here Robinson 1985: 297: 'one gets the strong impression that fact is sacred ... The theology is drawing out the history rather than creating it or even moulding it. It is an exercise in "remembering" in the pregnant Johannine sense of reliving the events "from the end", through the mind of the interpreter Spirit, presenting what they "really" meant, in spirit and in truth. It is a meta-history: not any the less historical the more theologically it is understood, but the depth and truth of history.'

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